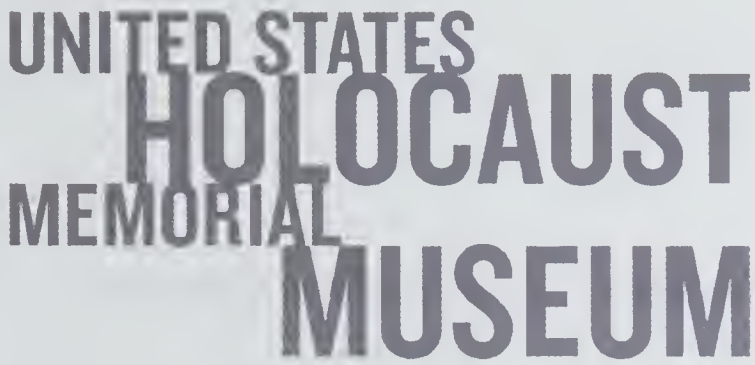

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A YOUNG JEWISH MAN'S REMINISCENCE OF SEVEN YEARS IN NAZI GERMANY

BY WALTER LOEB

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INTRODUCTION

In the following I tried to describe some of my special experiences which I encountered in Nazi Germany, where I grew up, as best as I can remember them. In doing so, I attempted to focus on some of the idiosyncracies and quirks of the Nazi regime as they affected me personally, and whose weird and unjust laws whom I had to endure for over seven years. It was also the period immediately prior to the Holocaust. I am writing these episodes for the benefit of my family, and anyone else who wishes to study this absurd, horrendous, and outrageous period in history.

CHAPTER I

EARLY CHILDHOOD YEARS AND SCHOOLING

I was born during W. War I, in a small town near the university city of Heidelberg, Germany, and was raised in the tumultuous postwar years. My family shared in the hardships of a defeated nation. There were shortages of food, clothing, and shelter everywhere. Coal, which was a vital resource, was quite scarce. In Germany, at that time, all the cooking of food, and the heating of homes heavily depended upon coal, which was rationed. Often, in sub-zero weather, I would stand in line for hours with my mother and older brother, Bernard, at the railyard, where this precious commodity was sold. Because of expediency, the dealer did not bother to load the coal from freight cars onto trucks and haul it to his yard. Instead, he distributed it directly from the freight car in which it had arrived to his customers. The coal was filled into burlap bags, which we hauled away in our small wooden hand-cart.

The name of the town of my birth would not be significant, were it not for the fact that when I am asked where I was born, listeners sometimes would recoil in shock and horror, as I hesitatingly utter the word "Birkenau." This is quite understandable, since it bears the identical name as that other Birkenau, the infamous death wing of Auschwitz. By contrast, my hometown lay in a scenic valley, at the foothills of the well-known Odenwald Mountains, with their beautiful forests. It had a nice and pleasant climate with clean air, so that in later years it was designated as a resort. Translated, the name Birkenau means "birch meadow", because of the abundance of birch trees that grew in and around the town. Cherry trees also sprouted there on lush meadows, alongside of a bubbling brook which peacefully flowed through the town's center. Each spring we looked forward to the pretty sight when the cherry trees were in bloom. When the cherries began to ripen, some boys of he town

would climb the trees and picked cherries surreptitiously. When caught, they would be severely punished.

Baron von Wamboldt was the richest man in town who owned three magnificent mansions and a well cared-for park (Schlossgarten)with exotic birds and beautiful flowers. Most of the park was off limits. But my uncle who was a photographer and nature-lover had befriended the baron and was allowed to roam the park at will. Since I often carried my uncle's equipment. I also became privileged to escort him through the park and the main mansion. A private chapel also stood in the middle of the park, with an adjacent burial crypt that bore the gilded inscriptions of ancestral names, such as those seen in museums and old royal crypts. There was also a beautiful pond with swans, where children were allowed to skate in the winter. The baron traveled quite extensively in his carriage, supposedly to look after his many land holdings and to collect the rent. He had the reputation of being a philander, a rumor that was told in connection with a secret tunnel that connected the main house with the caretaker's cottage. But the baron also was a philanthropist who made one his mansions available as a shelter home for underprivileged children. Each summer these children would arrive from the city for some fresh air, and spend their vacations there. My uncle was commissioned by the baron to snap the children's picture at the shelter home. In recent years I discovered that the baron was evicted in 1945, when General Patton's Army made the mansion its regional headquarters.

From old tombstones and archival records, we discovered that my family's name Loeb was first mentioned in the year 1796, although Jews were living there in 1679 and earlier.

From excavated artifacts bearing Hebrew inscriptions it has been learned that Jews were already

present in Germany in the third century A.D. Where they came from is a matter of conjecture. But it can be assumed that they came from Spain, France or Italy. In the nearby city of Worms where the famous commentator RASHI studied, there was a 1000-year old synagogue. In the town of Birkenau a new synagogue was built in 1859, after the old one had been destroyed by fire. An old newspaper clipping says that at its dedication the governor spoke of brotherhood and love. My father, Ferdinand, was the last president of this small congregation, which never had more than 100 families, which struggled to maintain a synagogue and a cemetery. The synagogue was only partially destroyed on "Crystal Night" (Nov. 10, 1938), because brave neighbors actually were able to convince the arsonists that it now was town properly. Only two days before that infamous event, my father as the last congregational president, had signed a sales agreement with the mayor, who made the offer, since he was aware that there was no longer the required quorum (minyan) for a service. The mayor wanted the building for a second firehouse. Thus it escaped the fate of the others which were set on fire by the Nazi hordes. The synagogue was set up in the orthodox fashion with women sitting upstairs in the balcony. Laymen conducted the Service, but twice a year the district rabbi came from the city of Darmstadt to deliver a guest sermon, or to officiate on a wedding or funeral.

The Jewish cemetery is still there and well-maintained, due to the foresight of a man who had already emigrated to the US at the turn of the century. In his will, he had set up a trust fund, the interest of which was to be sent each year not to the president of the Jewish community, but to the mayor for maintenance of the cemetery. Perhaps this man had a premonition that his hometown would someday be "Judenrein."

The system of non-separation of Church and State existed in pre-Hitler Germany. This had advan-

tages and disadvantages. For example, a congregation might qualify for a subsidy from the State, if it showed a deficit in its budget. The election of synagogue officers would take place in town hall, where it was monitored. With the non-Jewish population, we had pretty good rapport. My father was well-known, the mayor's schoolmate whom he called by his first name.

Both my maternal grandmother, Rosa, and my paternal grandfather Bernhard had died long before I was born. But I recall Emma, my father's mother. She was a stern matriarch, deeply religious, who ruled the family with iron hands. She had raised three sons and two daughters. We visited her every Saturday and on holidays, as she lived only a few streets away. The family always gathered there, and later it was together with the grandchildren and the great grandchildren.

My father was born in Birkenau. During World War I, although of draft-age, he was rejected by the Kaiser's army for being too short and also being somewhat sickly. However, he was obliged to work in one of the largest ammunition factories in the city of Mannheim. But the work was too strenuous for him, and again he became ill. My mother, Rosalie, then was able through a friend of hers to find him a position in Birkenau as a mailman. Interestingly, he was the only male letter carrier, as all the other men were serving on the front. Even his boss, the postmaster, was a lady. Women's lib there certainly seemed to be ahead of its time! Incidentally, four of my five uncles served honorably in World War I, and one of them died from a war-connected illness contracted in a battle zone near Sarajevo.

Later my father, who was self-taught, became an office manager. He commuted daily to Weinheim, a city of 20,000, by commuter train, a distance of 5 miles. Sometimes I was privileged to ride with him to the city of Mannheim, another 20 miles to the cattle market, where he acted as his boss's agent

by consummating the sale of cattle. In Birkenau he also assumed some kind of role as a "country lawyer" who aided war-widows, orphans and others. and had many non-Jewish friends. During the Hitler regime he assisted Jewish emigrants in processing their papers to enable them to leave Germany. Because of the acute housing shortage after W.War I, my family lived in an apartment that was old, cramped and dilapidated. For years my parents tried to find decent living quarters, without success. Finally, in 1929, my father luckily found a brand new apartment that he rented from a former school-mate, a Mrs. Leonhard who just had built a 3-story brick house, with us being her first tenants. She was a war widow with two daughters and a son, all of whom occupied the ground floor. Mrs. L. was able to build this house, because she had made payments to a building and loan association for years, and the government tried to help the crippled building industry. Before the house was finished, my father took me on an inspection tour, and I still remember the pleasant aroma of the wood used for building our apartment. We moved in before Passover that year, just three months before my Bar-mitzwah. Moving into this nice modern place was quite exciting and morally uplifting for all of us.

My earliest dramatic recollection from my childhood was a severe explosion about 50 miles away, where 300 people were killed at the Aniline Chemical and Dye Works in a suburb of Ludwigshafen on the Rhine. The force from this explosion was so powerful that it shattered some of our windows like an earthquake. My older brother had told me that it made me drop my cup of milk that I was holding in my hand. Also around this time Germany underwent a most severe financial crisis. This period became known as the "runaway inflation", when a loaf of bread cost 100 Marks!. Shopping bags and even wheelbarrows were used to carry one's money to the stores. The money decreased its

value almost daily, and since the printing presses could not keep up with the demand, it became necessary to go to the banks which merely rubber-stamped the paper money with its current value. Years later my parents showed me their collection of the now obsolete bills, including coins minted from iron ore, as copper had been scarce.

My mother, Rosalie, was born in a small hamlet in the province of Thuringia, not too far from the city of Weimar, where in 1919 the so-called "Weimar Republic" was formed. My mother's father, Phillip , my grandfather, was a cattle dealer in that town. He was a kindly man, and I still remember sitting on his lap, while he was smoking his long-stemmed grandfather pipe. Often, especially during vacations, I would visit him with my mother and older brother. It was about a four-hour train ride, but since there was no railroad station in his hamlet, he would pick us up at the nearest station in his horse-drawn carriage. In winter time the carriage would be replaced by a sled. Most of the time the ride was quite a thrill for me, except when it could get bitter cold in the Rhoen Mountains where he lived, and he would cover me with blankets. I was still a child when he died in 1925, but my mother used to tell me, not without pride, that he was buried with full military honors. This occurred because he was a decorated veteran of the Franco-Prussian war (1870/1871). He was also the only survivor from this war from the entire district. My mother proudly had kept the obituary with his picture always in her pocket book.

Sometimes, while visiting my grandfather, my mother would take me on a side-trip to my aunts, uncles, and cousins in the genteel city of Weimar, the capital of Thuringia, where Schiller and Goethe, Germany's foremost poets plied their literary trade. I also used to admire their bronze statue in the Gardens featuring this poetic pair in a firm hand clasp of friendship. Weimar was also the city

where in 1919, upon the creation of the "Weimar Republic," the new constitution was written, that was torn apart when Hitler came to power. But, alas, the sound of Weimar rings a sour note, if one remembers that the Nazis were able to establish a trial government in the State of Thuringia by making Weimar their capital even before Hitler assumed power in Berlin, not to mention the notorious Buchenwald concentration camp that was built in the 30's in close proximity of the city of Weimar.

I started a private Kindergarten, which actually was run by Protestant nuns, since my town had not yet a public Kindergarten. They always prepared for Christmas, but as a Jewish child, I did not have to participate in the singing of Christmas carols. But on St. Nicholas Day, I received apples like the others. It is also interesting to note that the Jewish ladies in my town actually belonged to the Sisterhood of the nuns, because the nuns had medical and first aid training, and would be available if there would be a minor medical problem. There were two doctors in town, but they were greatly overworked, and one would consult them only in case of emergency. From Kindergarten I went to public school which was compulsory for eight years. However, during the fourth grade one was given a choice to transfer to the "Gymnasium", which was sort of a junior and senior high school combination. I had to commute by train to the Gymnasium which was located in the nearby city of Weinheim. The school was a prerequisite if one wanted to choose a profession and enter a university. I was quite excited over having to make this choice, because I found public school boring, and older students had encouraged me to apply. There was another positive factor in this choice, as I also found out that in the Gymnasium corporal punishment was outlawed. We had witnessed this form of punishment, when sometimes the only crime of the student was that he did not do his homework!

I was an obedient child who never was punished, but I detested it when administered to others, because it invoked some kind of fear. To qualify for this school, a written exam was required, and then there was an oral exam in the presence of three teachers. After I passed the exams, my father had to take me to the principal's office for an interview. I remember how fearful I was when I first met this spectacled man in a black suit and stiff white color. My father had coached me as to how to behave in his presence. He was indeed quite formal, but tried to put me at ease when he noticed my nervousness. The Gymnasium was not free, but sometimes the city would give a stipend to worthy students.

In my first year in the Gymnasium, I began to study a foreign language. This began with French, and three years later there was another choice of English or Latin. Latin was required of students who planned to enter law, medicine, or pharmaceutical studies. I chose English, although I had no inkling that this would someday prove vital for me. It is noteworthy that school was conducted on Saturdays also, but there were neither written exercises nor exams given on that day, in deference to the Jewish students who for religious reasons were not permitted to write. The student body mostly consisted of children of professionals, business men, civil service employees, and some working class people. In the beginning, I was able to get along quite well with my fellow class-mates, but I was able to notice the gradual poisoning of their minds by outside Nazi agitators. The class bully was the first one to become extremely antisemitic, and made no secret of his beliefs. There was another student who when the teacher was not looking would pass Nazi propaganda literature around. Later he would become the leader of the Hitler Youth in his neighboring town. But among some teachers there also was a transformation. My English teacher became not only a member of the Nazi party, but he also joined the SS.

CHAPTER II

THE MACABRE WAR MEMORIAL EPISODE

In the late 1920's the Nazi party membership grew by leaps and bounds. And their behavior became emboldened day by day. The Nazis followed an annual ritual, where on each Armistice Day in November they posted SS.-guards who stood at rigid attention at the town's War Memorial for the fallen soldiers of W.War I during a 24-hour period. One might add, this was somewhat similar to the permanent spectacle at the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier.

In November 1931 they not only placed their guards, but also layed a wreath to which a sleeve with the swastika in black, white and red colors was attached. This caused an outrage by Mrs. Libman, a Jewish war widow whose husband's name appeared on the list of fallen soldiers on that monument. Mrs. L complained to my father who was then the president of the local Jewish community. My father then sent the following letter to the town officials:

"Dear Mayor and Town Council:

Unfortunately, we had to discover that a wreath with an attached swastika was laid at the monument for the fallen soldiers of the World War, which includes the names of three Jewish war heroes. Although no-one denies the right of honoring the dead, we are of the opinion that this can occur only without attachment of a party symbol. The act of placement with a swastika is injurious to people who hold different views and is an insult especially to us. Notwithstanding the paradox by which people who wear the swastika would honor the Jewish dead, the same people who are viciously attacking the Jewish living. Therefore, we ask this situation be remedied.

As we recall, the monument was erected with funds regardless of religion or party affiliation.

Therefore, we consider it our duty to ask you that the swastika be removed quickly and legally.

The Jewish Community of Birkenau

(signed)

Ferdinand Loeb

Emanuel Loeb

Adolf Libmann"

The town council forwarded this petition to the local veterans organization, maintaining that the monument is the property of the war veterans and stands on the property of Baron of Wamboldt. Subsequently, the veterans organization refused to remove the swastika, whereupon the town council canceled its annual contribution for the monument's maintenance. Another interesting twist to this story was that my father also had sent a copy of the letter to local Nazi party headquarters. They even sent a reply somewhat to the effect that they had not intended to insult the Jewish fallen soldiers. Interestingly enough, the party secretary who had signed this letter lived in our apartment house just one flight above us!

When the Nazis took power, the party took revenge by having the names of the Jewish fallen chiseled away. In 1966 the monument was dismantled, and a new one was established in a memorial park, with the names of the Jewish heros once again included.

CHAPTER III

WITNESSING HITLER's RISE TO POWER

I vividly remember that cold Monday of Janaury 30, 1933, when I had come home from the "Gymnasium", my high school. There was no snow on the ground, and my mother had sent me on an errand to the farm to buy some fresh vegetables. On the way back, near my house of birth, I met a newsboy who showed me the ominous headlines, stating that President Hindenburg had appointed Hitler "Reichskanzler" (Chancellor of the Reich). The boy seemed puzzled, as I was, but seemed to know this was not good for the Jews. I knew that the German government had been in trouble, plunging from one crisis to another. Several times before Hitler had begged Hindenburg to give him this monumental appointment. Hindenburg had rejected Hitler's previous bids, as being too radical, feeling that the future of Germany could not be entrusted to such a man. But on that weekend, the aged Hindenburg yielded to the enormous intrigue and deceitful promises that Hitler had made to him.

When I came home, the newspaper was at our doorsteps. My father and other Jewish leaders felt great consternation over this news, but even many Germans felt that perhaps Hitler should be given a chance, while others said he could not last. That evening there were huge torchlight parades staged by the Nazis. The Communists and Socialdemocrats held counter demonstrations, but it did not take

long before their leaders were arrested and silenced, with all political parties, except the Nazis, being outlawed. Also, on the same evening I could not help hearing Hitler's jubilant and exasparating radio speech to the German people saying "give me four years time". Now all the ills of Germany would be healed. To sound respectable, he made a few conciliatory remarks about the French and the British whom he always had blasted in prior speeches. We did not own a radio set, but one could not help hearing his speech from loudspeakers which were mounted in all the streets.

I did not know yet the full impact of Hitler's coming to power on my own life. In April of that year, I was to graduate from the "Gymnasium" and embark upon a career. I knew if I harbored any ambitions to attend a university, that would now be impossible, in particular, because my father was not a veteran of World War I, and for whose decendents some exceptions were being made, for the time being anyway. It would have been difficult for me in either case, because my father was not a wealthy man, and the university was usually only for the rich.

A year or so before, one day my father brought home a copy of Hitler's book "Mein Kampf" (My Struggle). I don't know how he obtained it, as it was only sold in Nazi party stores at that time. We both read the book, which contained Hitler's credo and a blueprint for conquest, that he had written in jail after his

abortive beer-hall "putsch" in 1923. Its style was geared towards the masses, rambling on with super-patriotic platitudes. For example, it said there was no greater honor than to be a soldier. Blood and soil were inseparable. The parliament, according to him, was made up of empty blockheads, unable to act. Everything that supposedly was wrong with Germany was spelled out here. My father seemed to sense that Hitler meant what he wrote in his book.

CHAPTER IV

A MAJOR TRAUMATIC EXPERIENCE

What prompted my excursion that balmy Sunday morning of my eighteenth year, was simply a young man's adventure. But it was this incident that was to bring my innocence into an awareness of the realities of life, that has persisted in my thoughts for half a century. More than 50 years have passed since that fateful day.

The day began like any other Sunday morning that May of 1934. The air was balmy and not a cloud was in the sky. Because of my job as a management trainee with the banking establishment of I.E., I had taken up residence in the city of Karlsruhe, the capital of Baden, some 60 miles from my home town. The Meyer family had taken me in just a year before as a boarder, when I had begun my training. I had adjusted fairly well to my new environment, and had become quite familiar with the city's streets, parks, and monuments. On the market place, stood the "pyramid," a famous landmark, which served as the burial place for Duke Charles(KARL), the city's founder, and for whom Karlsruhe (Charles's resting place) was named. The city's major streets were arranged radially, whose focal point was the duke's mansion and the "Schlossgarten", where I often took leisurely walks.

As a Jew, I was not allowed to enter college, but following my high school graduation I was hired by a small Jewish bank as a trainee. Actually, the directors were Jewish, and eight of the 15 employees

were not Jewish. The bank was located in the city of Karlsruhe on the Rhein, the current seat of the West German supreme court. Karlsruhe then was the capital of the province of Baden, where Jews had settled shortly after its foundation in 1715. Jews at one time were forbidden to leave the city on Sundays and Christian holidays. During my time (1933-1939) there were four synagogues: two orthodox, one conservative, and one hasidic. In 1933 the Jewish population numbered 3000, which decreased to 1400 by 1939. Once it had a Hebrew publishing house, and even a biweekly newspaper. It was also the seat of the central council of Baden's Jewry (Oberrat). According to an 1809 edict, the Jews there were granted partial emancipation. In 1862 they attained completed emancipation, and could be elected to the city council and the Baden parliament. As we no longer could attend theaters and movies, a Jewish cultural guild was established in the 30's, which provided quality cultural events.

On that Sunday then I was driven by an urge to further explore my new surroundings, and I toyed with the idea of getting away for a while from my landlord who was gruff, nervous, ill-tempered, and who tried to assume the role of a surrogate father. He constantly was preaching to me, as he was pursuing his self-appointed mission to transform me from what he perceived me as an uncouth country bumpkin into a well-polished city slicker. I discussed Mr. Mayer's attitude towards me with my father, who just said to me that I should bear

it for a while. Perhaps he thought that I had some growing up to do, and he was quite happy when 2 1/2 years later I took the initiative, on the advice of friends, and left the Mayer household. I had found a nice furnished room which two middle-aged ladies rented to me, and who now treated me with respect. Now I was a free agent and did not have to listen to Mr. Mayer's grumblings any more!

Mr. Antoni, the bank's custodian, was proud of his Italian name and ancestors who had come to Germany in the 1890's during the great railroad-building boom to help build tunnels and lay tracks. He had told me that I could use the bank's bike on weekends for my own enjoyment, as I had been accustomed to use it during the week while sometimes performing the task of messenger boy. It was Mr. Antoni who had taught me how to ride a bike, as I did not own one of my own before. A bike then was a precious vehicle, used by many to go to work.

Automobiles were few in number, owned by businessmen and the wealthy, and in my hometown there were just a handful. My father's boss had a chauffeur-driven "Adler", which he later traded for an "Opel". Sometimes, the chauffeur would give me a ride in the limousine, and I would feel like a king.

So, on that beautiful and beckoning Sunday morning, I rode the bike through some of the city's fashionable suburbs. Traveling along a short stretch of the Autobahn that had just been opened. I crossed

the bridge over the river Rhine. To the left was the "Rheinstrand-bad" (the river beach), that someone introduced me to during the previous hot summer. But we could not go there anymore: "Jews Not Allowed", so read the sign. I really did not care much about that beach, but friends and others had gone there every summer season to relax and frolic. So, naturally I felt quite bad for them, for being deprived of that leisure. To my right lay large vineyards and sweet-smelling pine forests. Later that day I came to realize that I should have turned back and gone home, but perhaps my boyhood curiosity overcame me, as I rode on and on. From my geography class I knew that somewhere in the distance there was the French border, and felt it more intriguing as I rode on. But suddenly the main road ended and turned into a gravel path which made me get off my bike. At this moment, I became severely startled when a man rushed over to me from nowhere. I did not realize that he was some sort of a guard, as he neither wore a uniform nor displayed a gun or some other weapon. In a harsh tone, he said to me "What are you doing here, don't you know you are in a restricted area?" In a trembling voice I answered:" I did not know I was in a forbidden zone and did not see any warning signs." I merely just embarked on a leisurely bike ride." He further asked me:" Do you have any identification with you that tells me who you are and where you came from?" I fumbled in my breast pocket and luckily found a letter addressed to me from my parents, which, of course, showed where I lived. When I

showed him the envelope, he said:" You mean you rode the bike all the way here from Karlsruhe?" Meekly I said:"yes." He seemed to believe me and said in an authoritative voice:" You better go right back home and never show your face here again."

As I began to turn around, ready to leave, I noticed in the nearby woods some canvass covers that were partially hiding some cement protrusions, whose purpose seemed a deep mystery to me.

I rode back as fast as I could. When I returned home in exasperation, my landlord met me at the door. His face, always forboding, was even more so now.

Mr Meyer was a small mustached man with a docile wife and three small children to feed, and perhaps trying to grapple with the realities and grimness of the times. His father had been a well-respected teacher, while he himself seemed to be frustrated, unable to follow his father's footsteps. Instead, he ran a printing shop where some of his Christian employees had joined the Nazi party and had become trouble-makers. No wonder he hated his work. By this time there was something more in his eyes. Being brought up in the truly German tradition of punctuality, he now strongly resented my tardiness, as he asked me " Where were you, you are very late for lunch."

"I was riding my bike down past the Rhine," I replied in a trembling voice. I told him what had occurred. I did not think what I had

done was such a crime, but he now looked quite terrified and his face became ashen as he said to me:"Do you know where you have been? The Nazis are building a secret defense line on the border, and you stumbled upon it! They are preparing for war! They could have mistaken you for a spy!", he exclaimed. Apparently, a loyal Christian employee of his had some insight knowledge and had told him of what he knew, even though it was strictly forbidden to talk about such secret matters. It was not until years later that I learned that unwittingly I had discovered the beginnings of the "Siegfried Line" or "Western Wall," which featured prominently in W. War II. It included concrete underground bunkers where the German army made its final stand against the Allies before its retreat.

In the 30's. the French, fearful of an invasion by the Germans, had built an elaborate fortification system with gun emplacements, known as the "Maginot Line." It stretched from Switzerland to the Belgian frontier, and consisted of a system of concrete bunkers, barbed-wire entanglements and anti-tank obstacles. But the French made the fatal error by not extending the Maginot Line across their Belgian border, but rather relying on outmoded fortresses left there from World War I.

I had been waiting for my landlord's anger about my tardiness, but I did not expect this. I stammered an apolgy and we then joined his wife, the children and their Christian maid for lunch. He sat eating

his meal in a mechanical way, while his plumb, diminuitive and docile wife did not say one word either. That strange glint of light was still in his eyes. But no more was said of the incident.

It was not until that evening, as I lay trying to sleep that I realized that the light in his eyes had been a reflection of his fear. I suddenly felt cold in that warm room. A realization of the future of my homeland began to come upon me. For the first time, I knew that the trepidation with which we Jews had watched Hitler come to power was grounded in reality. This would not be a passing storm. And if it did not pass, I would be considered the enemy.

At that moment, I knew with certainty that my family and I must leave Germany. I began to formulate plans with an urgency I had not felt before. I knew that it might take years and that there would be difficult times ahead. But it was the realization that I was being swept up in a tide beyond my control for reasons that were beyond belief, that put me over the edge from innocence into awareness. I began to realize I must seek out ways to retain my dignity within the circumstances whatever they be. I have maintained this belief ever since.

CHAPTER V.

GLIMPSING SOME OF THE NOTORIOUS NAZI BIGWIGS

It so happened that in 1936 and 1937 I involuntaryy got to see personal glimpses of the three top Nazis: Hitler, Goering and Goebbels. One morning our head cashier at the Bank who was not only a member of the party but also their liaison man, came excitedly to the office and announced that the "Fuehrer" would come to the city and paas along Kaiserstrasse (Main Street), just in front of the Bank. We were all to line up outside on the sidewalk, in a display of solidarity. Ae we stood for several hours, Hitler was driven by in an open Mercedes, poised in the Nazi salute. He looked grim and stiff, almost statue-like. His purpose in coming was a speech in anticipation of a plebiscite, where the outcome was 98% "yes." This result was often the butt of jokes.

A week later there was a similar spectacle when Goering passed by on the same spot. Unlike Hitler, the corpulent Goering was unable to stand straight, bouncing backward and forward in his limousine, and laughing fiendishly.

On another occasion, as I was walking home one Saturday, a huge crowd had had gathered on the Markt Platz (public square), where Goebbels stood with a coin box, collecting money for the socalled winter relief fund. This was another paradox, because poverty supposedly had been gotten rid of.

CHAPTER VI

MY CURIOUS "ENCOUNTER" WITH THE WEHRMACHT

(ANOTHER VERSION OF "EUROPA, EUROPA")

A 1990 German movie "Europa, Europa" which was also shown in the US reminded me of a comical, almost absurd experience, which I had in 1935 in Karlsruhe. In that movie, a Jewish boy successfully passes for an Aryan German as a member of the esteemed and paramilitary Hitler Youth. My experience was not as dramatic; nevertheless, I was able to draw a comparison based on what happened to me.

One of the Hitler regime's early acts was the establishment of the military draft. He repeatedly had told the German people that Germany had several enemies at its borders who wanted the destruction of Germany. And the existing token army of 100,000 permitted by the Treaty of Versailles would not be capable of defending Germany. After the military conscription law was passed, all German males at age 19 had to register with their local draft board. This did not exclude Jews, but the law stated that Jews were to be classified into a special reserve category, exempting them from military service in time of peace. We now know what that meant...The law also proclaimed that it was a high honor to serve the German nation as a soldier. Even though the Germans hated the Jews, it seemed ironic that Jews had to register at the draft board at all!

Anyway, when I became of age, I promptly received my notice and went

to the draft board for my physical. It was located in the convention hall and adjacent to an amusement park in the city of Karlsruhe. I was quite apprehensive by this, as I did not know what to make of it, and was quite nervous. The doctors and nurses were well organized with typical German efficiency. A large group of eager young Germans was present on that day, and a police officer directed us from station to station. I passed my physical with flying colors, and was sent to the final desk, where German military personnel was sitting. A sergeant completed my so-called military passport, which was adorned with a swastika on its cover. It contained one's vital data with the classification, and pages for entries in the event of battle participation. As required by the draft law, the sergeant checked off my "special reserve status"(translated:"Jewish"), and handed the document for signature to the Wehrmacht colonel who was seated next to him. The colonel apparently at first looked only at the parts where it stated that I had passed all tests, and said to the sergeant in astonishment: "But the man is fit, what is the matter with you?". Whereupon the sergeant politely informed him of my "non-Aryan" status. I was quite surprised at the colonel's oversight, as I had assumed that my Jewish status would be obvious. But that was not the end of that bizarre experience for me. The policeman then whisked everyone to a large adjoining room, where, lo and behold, the city of Karlsruhe had sponsored a big party with large steins of beer and pretzels, in gratitude to its "newly-baked"

army recruits. I could not get out of this, and felt quite uneasy among all those other "true" future German soldiers. The party was quite jovial, but the conversation consisted only of small talk. I believe I was the only Jew present, and luckily, Jews were never mentioned in the discussions. Some expressed their great joy of being able to serve the "Fuehrer". Who knows how many of them later died at Stalingrad or Normandy. A few even said good-bye to me with the words "see you in fall at barracks X". Quickly, I had learned to become an actor by echoing that sentiment.

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OOTNOTE HERE:

One year after I arrived in the U.S. I was drafted into the American army, and was inducted at Fort Dix, NJ, even though I was not yet an American citizen. The difference for me was that now I had a true cause and true enemy to fight. But I had to face yet another paradox: When in Dec. 1941 Germany declared war on the U.S., the American army immediately classified me as an "enemy alien". For 1 1/2 years I had to carry a pink card with me identifying me as such, while wearing the uniform of the U.S. Army. Only after Congress passed legislation addressing the issue of foreigners in the armed forces, was I allowed to become an American citizen and "loyal" U.S. soldier.

My petition to serve as an interpreter was ignored. I was not sent to Europe but served nearly five years, in the South Pacific and Okinawa, where I was stationed at the time of the dropping of the atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki. In December 1945, I was sent home and discharged.

CHAPTER VII

THE ILL-FATED CATTLE TRANSPORTS

One of the directors of the Bsnk where I was working was an ardent Zionist. He realized early during the Hitler regime that there was no future for the Jews in Germany. He had made exploratory trips to Palestine and went there in the Spring of 1933 and rented an apartment in Tel Aviv. His family would join him later in the fall. While in Palestine he learned of the Jewish farmers plights there They lacked livestock and he decided to use the Bank's resources to finance shipments of good cattle from Germany to Palestine. He returned to Germany and discussed this with his partner who was running the Bank. A cattle dealer was approached who was given the assignment to find suitable livestock for shipment to Palestine. The German authorities did not mind these transactions and even issued export licenses, since it would provide Germany with sorely needed foreign currency. Several cattle shipments were made over a period of almost three years which were financed by the bank. But Suddenly, the German authorities had a change of heart. They not only forbade any future cattle exports, they arrested the manager of the Bank and falsely accused the Bank of illegal transactions, and having violated the Export Act. He was released after three months, but soon afterwards they arrested the other director of the Bank. Then a team of German customs police arrived at the Bank and setup an office there to investigate these alleged illegal

transactions. The Customs police stayed for about seven months, and I was frequently called upon to provided them with documents from files. Of course, they could not find any incriminating evidence. Yet, they arrested the director for a while and levelled a large fine against the Bank.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE "NUEREMBERG" LAWS

In 1935 the so-called "Nueremberg" Laws were passed. These laws were named from the old city of Nueremberg in Bavaria, and were the product of a party congress that was held there. Basically, these laws prohibited marriages between Jews and Gentiles. This included even interdating, or any contact between the sexes. Violators would be severely punished, and thrown into concentration camps. However, many who were sent to camps, actually were innocent, as victims were denounced wrongfully and arrested by the Gestapo. Jewish households now were obliged to get rid of their Christian maids.

I personally observed this at the Meyer household, where I was living, as their Christian maid had to leave. In this connection, a strange incident occurred one Saturday morning. My friends and I were escorting a Jewish girl home from synagogue who had light blond hair and blue eyes, making her look like a typical "Aryan" girl, and thus fitting the Nazi mold. As we entered Main Street, a storm trooper passed by and admonished the girl with the words, "if I were you, I would not walk with those guys." The Jewish girl brazenly dared to ask him "why." He then answered: "Because they are Jews," and to which she answered: "I am also Jewish." The storm trooper left in embarrassment, that this Jewish girl somehow had shattered his indoctrination that only German girls were blond and blue-eyed.

CHAPTER IX.

HITLER's ILLEGAL OCCUPATION OF THE RHINELAND

Hitler defiantly violated several provisions of the peace treaty of Versailles which Germany signed in 1919, at the end of World War I. In March 1936, he gave orders to the Wehrmacht to occupy the demilitarized zone of the Rhineland which included the city of Karlsruhe. It so happened that on that crucial day I found myself walking on Main Street. It was about noon-time, when suddenly I heard the sounds of military music in the distance. As it came closer, I saw columns of Wehrmacht soldiers goose-stepping, amidst the cheerful greetings of civilians, including girls who tossed flowers at the soldiers. Historians have said that World WAr II actually started on that day, because the French could easily have repulsed the still fledgling German army, and thus nipped national socialism in the bud. By their inaction, the French had paved the way for Hitler's further aggressions against Austria, Czechoslovakia, and Poland, only a few short years afterwards. At the bank where I worked, one of the Christian employees, a Mr. Froehlich sometimes was quite outspoken by critizing the government. Being a disabled veteran of World War I, he seemed to feel that he could get away with it. I only hope he was right. He predicted that Hitler wanted war and was preparing to swallow up one neighboring country after another. Often he would tell me to "disappear," as he saw no hope for the future for the Jews in Germany.

CHAPTER X.

CLOSING OF A SYNAGOGUE

On Sunday, November 6, 1938, I was present at a unique ceremony in my town and all of Germany, when the final Service was held. The congregation had diminished since a number of the members had emigrated. So, my father as its last president had masde arrangements to sell the building to the town, which was supposed to use it as an extra firehouse.

Prof. Karl D. Darmstaedter, another native son, who also bore witness to this sad event, wrote in "The Jewish Way" (New York, 1964):

"The synagogue had become empty. There were no Minyans (necessary quorum for a Service) any more. Many had migrated abroad. Thus with heavy heart, the decision was reached to sell the house of worship. Others in the village were surprised to see once again familiar faces. It must also be said that there were serious, even tearful faces which wanted to say something nice, perhaps something friendly or consoling. They did not dare.

The house of worship appeared as on the High Holidays which only weeks before had united the small group in the bright synagogue, decked in white. And today there was to be the last NEILAH (final) Yom Kippur prayer... The congregation was serviced by a district

rabbi from the city of Darmstadt, who had come for this occasion. Of course, he and those assembled had no inkling of what great tragedy was to take place only four days later (Crystal Night), not to speak of the worrisome forbodings and fears of that period. But it was more than timely when the rabbi sermonized in the late afternoon during the approaching twilight, and added the words of the MAARIV (evening) prayer, 'He rolls away the light before the darkness, and the darkness before the light.'

We know today that to utter such words in those days was daring, almost foolhardy, and subject to dangerous misinterpretation. But somehow there were no clandestine observers or henchmen present. But those who listened understood the deeper meaning of thode words only too well. Later they often thought about them. It was a simple hour of farewell. Those who were born and raised there once again viewed the old Torah Scrolls, about whose future safekeeping one had worried. The familiar objects were displayed for the last time during the brief span of the late autumn hour. This was the place where the fathers and grandfathers had prayed. Old schoolmates met and took saddened farewell. The synagogue was closed with utter finality. The last of the congregational presidents, who now also after many wanderings from the 'Staedl' through continents and oceans has found his final resting place somewhere in New Jersey, took the bulky key. Things became silent as night approached.

It was not destroyed like the others on that fateful day, only four days later ... But the president and the few other men, the elder and the invalid were herded off into darkness... it does not matter whether it was called Dachau or Buchenwald..."

CHAPTER XI

ARRESTED BY THE GESTAPO ON "CRYSTAL NIGHT"

There can ben no doubt that Crystal Night, which occurred between Nov.9 and Nov. 10, 1938, was the prelude to the Holocaust. On that fateful day, the Nazis organized the first nationwide pogrom by burning over 1000 synagogues, vandalizing thousands of Jewish shops, and arresting 30,00 male Jews.. All over Germany and Austria the loud (cacophonical) sounds of shattered glass were heard. But the rest of the world remained silent and did nothing. This act was a final warning, a macabre warning, of course, by the Nazis, who now were in their 6th year of power, for the Jews to get out, because in their eyes the Jews were not leaving Germany fast enough.

Before I go into some of the details of my experiences, I like to to give a quick historical background. In the year 1938, actually, the outside world allowed the Nazis to achieve two stunning successes. In March '38 Hitler marched into Austria without a single shot being fired, which event became known as the "Anschluss". And in September of the same year, the prime minister from Great Britain and premier of France, together with the Fascist dictator Mussolini appeased Hitler in Munich, and handed him a slice of Chechoslovakia. Between those two events there was still another factor that contributed to the fate of the Jews: In July 1938, a 32-nation conference was called in Evian, Switzerland that was supposed to find ways for them to take in refugees. Only one country, the

Dominican Republic declared its willingness to admit 100,000 Jews. All the others found excuses for not being able to do anything. No wonder then that with Hitler's ego thus bolstered, he decided the time was ripe to solve the so lled "Jewish Question" quickly. It was only two weeks after Munich that all Jews in Germany who held Polish passports were suddenly arrested and forcibly shipped across the Polish border.

The Poles did not welcome these people who now had to live in squalor and hunger. One of the afflicted families by the name of Grynspan had a 17-year old son Hershel who had migrated to Paris, received a postcard from his sister describing their fate. Hershel became enraged and vowed to shoot the first German official he would encounter. Herschel went to the German consulate in Paris and shot a secretary of the consul. His death was used by Germany's minister of propaganda as the pretext to unleash this mass attack.

It was in Karlsruhe that I was arrested on that fateful day, one out of 400 from that city. As an ironic twist, I just want to mention that a few years ago I received a copy of the official Gestapo decree which stated that only prominent or wealthy Jews were to be arrested. I fitted into neither category, as I was just a bank clerk . But I WAS arrested, and this time they did not exactly follow the orders of their chief.

I also learned here that the New York Times had printed an article about Kristallnacht, which said that some of the prominent Jews

arrested were told they were hostages to ensure the good behavior of the Jews living outside Germany.

On the morning of Nov. 10, my landlord, who was very pious, had gone to the morning Services, as he did most mornings, and sometimes I would join him. I had just gotten up, when suddenly there was a knock on my door. It was my landlady who said that her husband wanted to talk to me. As I wondered why he had come back from Shul so soon, he was visibly upset and shaken as he told me that the synagogue was on fire and my boss, the bank manager, had been arrested along with other worshippers. He himself was able to get away.

I then mentioned to him that on that morning it was my turn to pick up the vault key at the manager's apt. My host thought this would not be wise, as the manager's apt. might be surrounded by guards. I remembered then that the director of the bank had a duplicate key and I decided to ride my bike to his home. His home was in a fashionable neighborhood and I had been invited there before for shabbat dinner. I had the chuzpah (gall) to ring the director's bell at about 8:30 AM, and he opened still in his nightgown, This was, of course, not the normal thing to do, after all, I was only a junior clerk. He was quite startled to see me there, and asked me in a not very friendly manner what I wanted and what was going on. When I told him that the manager had been arrested and the synagogue was on fire, he asked me to come in and sit down in his drawing

room. At that moment the phone rang. It was the bank's non-Jewish custodian, Mr. Antoni, who reported that the offices had been severely vandalized during the night, ransacked, papers and files were all over the floors. He recommended that we not come to work on that day. We looked at one another, and he asked me what I was going to do. I said that I would take the next train home to my parents, because in that mountain village things had been rather calm before. He even said to me: "Are you sure?, as I did not realize that this would have been futile, as the train stations were guarded also.

I left his home to get my suitcase, but did not get very far. As I entered Main street, there was a crowd and some sort of a roadblock. Across the street I spotted a friendly face, it was the sexton from our congregation. It was this fateful gaze of mine towards the sexton, which apparently identified me as a Jew. I was arrested, with lightening speed, by two persons who looked like hooligans or henchmen who told me to follow them to police headquarters. The two persons were hardly older than myself, and I dared ask them what I had done. One of them then said in a gruff voice, "you'll find out." Incidentally, a few years ago, I saw a copy of the official Gestapo decree ordering the arrests of male Jews, predominately prominent or wealthy. Being only a junior bank clerk, I did not fit this description. But I was in he habit of carrying a brief case, and I have come to the conclusion that is why I was arrested on that

fateful day.

When we got to the police station, there were other Jewish prisoners. Some had bloody noses, as they were beaten up, probably they resisted arrest.

A police spokesman then said we were there because of what had happened in Paris. Nothing would happen to us, if we were to cooperate, and it was all for our own protection. They took us into prison cells, and later in the afternoon gave each of us a small loaf of bread. Late in the evening. they marched us to the train station, and a few onlookers jeered along the way. We boarded a special train with destination unknown. We travelled thru most of the night, when our worst fears came true as we arrived at Dachau before dawn under blinding spotlights. We were greeted by a "welcoming committee" consisting of a large body of storm troopers with helmets and riotgear, who constantly taunted us with loud insults.

As we were standing in formation, they kept asking prisoners at random if they knew why they were "here". Anyone who answered "no" was promptly slapped in the face and one learned quickly. Then a guard gave the command for the rabbi to step forward. I believe that about 30 complied, and in gratitude for their obedience were beaten up. We were then processed and interrogated, all of which took about three days. For more than 24 hours we received no food, we had to take showers, and the guards took fiendish delight by

alternately squirting hot and cold water into the mouths of prisoners. Somehow, I was spared that fiendish ordeal.

The guards were hardly older than myself and seemed to single out older men for greater harassment. (Perhaps they thought we younger ones had not yet committed such big crimes). Our heads were shaven clean, and we were photographed. They took our physical measurements in a room that did racial research. After asking for our occupation, they answered usually with strong sarcasm. Thus, if one was a "business man", he was called a "cheat", and if one was a skilled craftsman, such as an electrician, he was called a "liar". Part of the routine was to ask us about our personal income, bank account, and assets. As I found out later, the reason for this was that a fine of of 1 Billion Marks had been levied against the entire Jewish community, allegedly to atone for the assassination in Paris. In reality, they wanted that money to pay for insurance claims, as much property destroyed and pilfered during Crystal Night was also owned by non-Jewish Germans and foreigners. German insurance companies had refused to honor such claims.

A grotesque situation arose during the first night, when a prisoner-trustee (his name was Franzl) took us to a temporay shed and told us to line up our shoes in one area. There were about 300 of us in that group, and the following morning when we were awakend before dawn, we had just 15 minutes to get ready, As a result, most shoes did get mixed up and did not fit. Later when a guard asked me, why

I did not march properly, I had to explain to him the shoe mixup, to which he laughed sarcastically.

About 1000 prisoners were assigned to one barracks each. The rooms became extremely overcrowded, being filled to four times their previous capacity. A total of 11,000 prisoners had been sent to Dachsu within a few days.

Each room was supervised by a prisoner trustee whose title was "room elder", and went by the name of "Franzel". Typically this man was a political prisoner such as a Social Democrat or Communist. His first function was to explain to us the camp rules. One of these mentioned an 8'oclock curfew (the barracks were not locked). Anyone who would open the door after 8 and stepped out, would be shot immediately. The searchlights were constantly illuminating the barracks at night, and the guards from the machine gun towers would have little difficulty in spotting violators. Some committed suicide this way, and others touched the electrified barbed wire, which surrounded the camp. Franzel reported to the barracks elder, who was in charge of all four rooms in the barracks. Our barracks elder whose name was "Sass", in turn, reported to the SS-guards. Sass was a tall and gruff fellow, hardened by years of prison life. He repeated the camp rules to us, and said to us sardonically "the laws of Dachau are written in blood."

The daily routine began at 4:30 in the morning. All prisoners had to parade on the Appel-Platz (roll call square). The commander or his deputy took the roll call, as all prisoners "in protective custody," as we were called, had to stand at attention. This could take a long time, particularly, if the figures,did not add up, of if Heaven forbid, a prisoner had managed to escape.

We did not routinely have to do heavy labor, but most of the day was occupied by doing military formation drills, doubletime runs, etc. Many of the older prisoners collapsed and died, as they could not keep up this rigorous routine. This somewhat para-military training had a strange effect on me 2 years later after I had been drafted into the US Army. My drill sergeant wondered were I already had received my training. But he was puzzled why I was doing one command incorrectly. The reason was that the Germans had taught me that one differently.

One morning, on roll call square, the order was issued for all millionaires to step forward, and a number complied. Near me stood an elderly banker, presumably a millionaire, who defied this order and did not budge. At this moment, one of the guards remembered this banker from the time of registration. He yelled at the man, had him pulled out and beaten severely until he was unconscious.

We had a prisoner who was feeble-minded and could not follow orders. Every morning someone had to lead him by the hand to the square. But

one morning, fellow prisoners were ordered to bring him to the dispensary. After a week or two had gone by, we asked the trustee what happened to him. The prisoner trustee meerely shrugged his shoulders, and you can draw your own conclusion.

After a month or so, we were given postcards to write home using a prescribed text, that we were well and well treated. Our family should send us money, which we were to use to buy toothpaste and soap at the cantine run by the SS, at exorbitant prices. They also made us subscribe to the official Nazi newspaper. At least we learned about some of the news outside, even if much was propaganda. Although they stressed hygiene, there was an outbreak of typhoid fever in one of the barracks which was quarantined. Fortunately, it was some distance away from my barracks. There was another strange incident when it had become bitter cold, and some prisoners had not received undershirts, because of a shortage. So, some had the idea of stuffing newspapers into their uniform as insulation from the cold. This was reported, and the next morning an announcement was made, that anyone caught with newspapers in their uniforms would receive 25 lashes.

During my stay at Dachau we had two important visitors: first there was a Japanese newsteam, when everything had to be spic and span. Then there was a rumor that H. Himmler, chief of the SS was going

to come. I did not know what he looked like, but one day an entourage of well-dressed SS-men came who hurled insults at us.. One Sunday afternoon, a prisoner from another barracks and from a neighboring town, came to me excitedly and told me that he had met my father there. He was arrested in Mannheim on a business trip. I was able to meet him at times. Fortunately, his lot was not too difficult, as his commanding prison-elder gave him housecleaning duties.

There is one amusing episode I like to tell: Around Christmas time we had to cut Christmas tree figures from the newspapers and decorate the walls. We also had some prisoners with us who were members of a theatrical group from Vienna. They sang songs poking fun at life in the camp. We posted lookouts to watch for guards. But things were a little more relaxed then, as many guards had gone home for the holidays. This shows that even in their darkest days the Jews found some humor.

I am happy to say that most so-called "November" Jews were released after a while. Finally, my turn came and we had to take a physical. I did not pass, because I had visibly frostbites on my hands, and they did not want the outside world to see scars or marks of mistreatments (such as beatings etc.) They were still sensitive to public and foreign opinion. I also found out that Nazi propaganda

had told the world that the German people had spontaneously erupted", and said that they had to put us into protective custody. So I had to see that the frostbites would be healed. Going to the so-called infirmary was of little use. But Franzel, my room elder, who was quite a humane fellow, loaned me his gloves and recommended that I rubbed my hands with snow. It worked, and a week later I was again called for release. This time I passed the physical, and they returned my clothes and belongings. I had spent a total of two months in Dachau.

The commandant made a speech telling us how lucky we were, how well we had been treated in the camp. If we were to tell otherwise, we would be hauled back, never to be released again.
And we must leave Germany quickly. He also admonished those planning to go to the USA or elsewhere that the same would apply, because the Gestapo has "long arms."

I took the train back to Karlsruhe nnd reported to Gestapo headquarters, as instructed. A Gestapo officer repeated the same rubbish that we heard from the camp commander before leaving.

Kristallnacht marked the end of all Jewish institutions, sports clubs etc.,and Jewish newspapers, except for the offices of organizations which helped indivuduals with the emigration process.

In the meantime, the bank had been forcibly closed by the authorities, but I was happy to go back to my parents. However, I still was not able to leave Germany for another year, because of the quota system. and was still there at the start of W. War II. I found assigned work in a brick yard, which was the only work available then to Jews.

I would like to just quickly mention what had happened in my home town during Kristallnacht. That synagogue was not destroyed along with the others. Because of a dwindling congregation due to immigration, there were not enough for a Minyan (a quorum required for a Jewish Service) anymore, and thru the efforts of my father's ,who was the last congregational president, it was sold to the town to become a firehouse. Only three days before that infamous event, there was a last Service with a sermon by the district rabbi. Former Jewish residents who had moved away came to participate, and all were greatly saddened. But on Kristallnacht the arsonists came, but were told that the building now was town property. They left the building intact, but comnpletely set fire to the objects inside. A Jewish woman from nearby came to salvage the Torahs, but was chased away by the hooligans. My mother told me that 12 SS-men came to our apt. They did not harm her, but took the money which was from the downpayment of the synagogue. When my father later reported this to the police and mayor, they told him that these people were out-of-

towners and nobody knew who they were.

One final Note: After my arrival in New York in Mar. 1940, my cousin told me that on Kristallnacht, the mayor of New York, who was then Fiorello Laguardia, had dispatched Jewish policemen to protect the German Consulate in the Battery from demonstrators. The Nazis scoffed at this by saying that Jews were not capable of protecting anyone. Needless to say, they could not envision that one day there would be a strong Israeli army...

CHAPTER XII

FORCED LABOR AND THE START OF WORLD WAR II

After Crystal Night, the situation for the Jews in Germany became quite grim. Newly released edicts forbade ownership of cars, bicycles, radios, appliances and jewelry. Jewish organizations were being closed, except the ones that helped the emigration process. All Jewish newspapers were now banned. Families had to move out of apartments owned by Gentiles and move to Jewish owned houses, thus establishing a new Ghetto atmosphere. We moved from our nice new apartment into the old house which my grandmother had left before she died. There really was not too much room, but my two aunts were obliged to move in with us also.

In the meantime, the Bank where I was working before my arrest had now received its orders from the Nazi government to liquidate. It probably was one of the last Jewish business establishments being closed, and allowed to exist that long only because of the cattle exports. In April 1939 I became unemployed. The Department of Labor assigned me to a local brick yard, where I now would learn how to make facing bricks used in the building trade. This kind of work was one of the few activities allowed for Jews. It was quite a change for me, but I adjusted rapidly.

Several months later, the war broke out, creating an atmosphere of fear of the unknown. It was still a silent war, with no shots being fired. Food and clothing were rationed. One day, when my aunt who later died in Theresienstadt went to town hall to pick up ration cards for the family, she overheard that persons who did heavy labor would get extra rations. She even was able to speak to the mayor who promptly obliged and gave her extra coupons for me. The owner of the brick yard, who was a reserve colonel in the Wehrmacht, had to report for active duty. The brick yard was closed and I found new work at a large tile plant in the town of Heppenheim, which produced building material for army

barracks. One day a director of the plant addressed us in our lunch room where we were segregated from the non-Jewish workers. He told that he had been quite satisfied with our work and production in general. But the Nazi party had requested that we also be segregated on the assembly line. He further informed us that he had sent a letter of reply to the party to the effect that he was well aware of the "Jewish problem," but for practical reasons he could not comply with their request. I do not know what the final outcome of this situation was, since I left Germany several months afterwards.-wards. During this time my father also had become unemployed, because his Jewish boss had emigrated to Uruguay. Fortunately, he found some part-time work with a non-Jewish school friend who had a factory. This was, of course, no longer permitted. But his friend aaked my father to come in at night, in secrecy, and do some office work.

When on September 1, 1939 Hitler had invaded Poland, and thus unleashed World War II. He made an angry speech that the war was being forced on Germany. But Germany was prepared, come what may. Blackout was now put in effect. Thus started the period of what has been called the "phony war," that was void of casualties and lasted for six months. However, occasionly I could hear tbe sound of gunfire from the distant French border, as the French apparently fired warning shots in the vain hope that the Wehrmacht would retreat. Also, at the tile factory, a fellow worker once showed me a leaflet which had been dropped by a British plane, asking the Germans to revolt against Hitler. Also, in November of that year an assassination attempt was made against Hitler. A bomb went off at the lecturn in Munich, where he was to speak, but was saved due to a traffic delay. Thousands were arrested afterwards, and the British were blamed for this plot.

CHAPTER XIII

ANOTHER "ENCOUNTER" WITH THE "WEHRMACHT" AND THE "GESTAPO"

December 19, 1939 was to be the happiest day in my life. An official letter arrived from the American Consulate in Stuttgart, advising me that I was to appear at their offices on December 15, 1939, to bring my passport and to process my visa application. I was overjoyed, since I had been waiting for this moment for over two years, because of quota restrictions only a limited number of immigrants were permitted to enter the US per year.

Nazi Germany had been at war with France and England for over three months now, and traveling was difficult. Fewer trains were running for civilians, since the Wehrmacht had requisitioned railroad equipment for troop movements to strategic positions at the border.

My parents and I discussed how I should best travel to Stuttgart where I was expected at 7 AM on December 15th. Theoretically, I could have traveled there the night before, and stayed overnight. There was a special problem for Jews, however, which meant that because of a curfew for us, we could not be in the street after 8 PM, under risk of being arrested by the Gestapo. My father suggested that I travel first the shorter distance to Heidelberg, where he knew of a place for me to stay overnight. I would then get up early in the morning, continuing by express train to Stuttgart, where I could arrive in time for my early morning appointment. However, just before the train got to Heidelberg, it came to a halt and did not move for over two hours. There were all sorts of rumors why the train was not moving. But I became more and more nervous, and began to realize that when I finally would arrive in Heidelberg, after 8 PM, I would be in violation of the curfew law, and might easily be spotted in that smaller and more quiet city. I had to make a decision. Since my train was going to Stuttgart anyway, why not go to that larger city and take my chances. I spoke with the conductor who gladly

sold me an extension ticket to Stuttgart.

When I arrived in Stuttgart, it was just after 10 PM. I went to the nearest hotel across the railroad station to look for a room. One of the first questions the hotel clerk asked me: "Are you Aryan,"? When I honestly replied in the negative, he politely informed me with regrets, that he could not rent a room to me. I really did not know about this other law, and went to two more hotels with the same results. I was overcome by an eerie feeling, since the city, because of war time rule, was almost completely blacked out, except for a few dimly-lit street lights, and the streets were almost deserted. But somehow I bumped int a small group of German boys and girls, probably my own age, who were just roaming around and spending a Sunday evening. They did not know I was Jewish, but I began a conversation by asking if they knew of a place where I could stay overnight. One of the fellows suggested we walk to the house of a lady who had been renting out rooms. I rang the bell, when an old lady appeared, somewhat annoyed at that late hour, and repeated the same cliche to me. My suddenly found "friends" did not hear the conversation, and one of their leaders had a suggestion which sounded great at the time. He said to me: Why don't you go to the waiting room at the train station, where there is a bar, and where you can relax. He further said: " We will go with you. But it would be necessary to first purchase a train ticket to the nearest suburban station, since the bar was located inside the gates. I consented, and we all turned up at the railroad bar drinking beer together. Since I carried a small suitcase, they assumed I was some sort of a traveling salesman and were not too inquisitive as to what I was doing in the city. From the effect of the beer I soon fell asleep at one of the circular and wooden barroom tables. When I woke up way past midnight, my so called friends had left, but I was startled, as I was now surrounded by a new set of friends. These "friends" were dressed differently: They were dressed in green uniforms and were soldiers of the "Wehrmacht". As

I looked around, they occupied every table in the room, while I was one of the few civilians present! My Wehrmacht "buddies" were quite jovial, and insisted that they buy me beer. They openly talked about their mission: They were leaving their barracks nearby to be shipped northwest along the river Rhine. Most likely, they were being prepared for the invasion of Belgium and France, which occurred six months later. Once again, after a number of involuntary rounds of beer, I fell asleep. This time I woke at about 5:30 in the morning, and began to get ready by trying to find some "Ersatz" coffee (a coffee substitute, since real coffee was not available in war-time Germany) and walking the short distance to Kaiserstrasse, where the American Consulate was located. Just as I began to open the exit door, two men in business suits blocked my exit. One of them who carried a briefcase showed me his Gestapo ID and asked me what I was doing at the station. I showed him my invitation to the Consulate and my passport. Whereupon, the senior official retorted with the remarks: "No one can leave Germany anymore." But the junior official once again corrected him by saying that this was still possible. They thoroughly scrutinized my documents and then left me alone, but arrested a man, presumably because he had no ID papers. I was convinced they were looking for spies, or other German enemies. Only weeks before there had been an unsuccessful attempt to assassinate Hitler.

CHAPTER XIV.

IN SEARCH OF ASYLUM

As early as 1933 it became clear to many young Jews, especially those who had lost their jobs, that there was no future for them in Germany. With the aid of a Zionist-oriented rabbi, my father organized a program whereby some young idealists would obtain training as farmers and emigrate to Palestine. He contacted local farmers in Birkenau who hired these young Jews as trainees and helpers. The farmers were quite satisfied with their diligent and enthusiastic labor. They were housed with Jewish families, and some stayed in my aunt's house. But in 1934 the Nazi party stopped this effort, prohibiting Jews to work on Gentile farms. Yet, about 12 of these pioneers, who were from the city of Mannheim, were able to emigrate to Palestine and start a new life.

I was not too keen to become a farmer, but we explored all other possibilities of asylum abroad, by studying material which described immigration policies of various countries, including the United States. My brother left Germany in 1937 for Argentina. He was able to join a family that needed just one more "farmhand" for settling there on a Baron Hirsch agricultural establishment. As for myself, I had made some unsuccessful attempts to leave for several years. I had written to relatives in the US to act as my sponsor, but they did not respond. When I was in Dachau, however, my mother cabled my father's cousins in the US to send me an affidavit of support. And it was my incarceration that provided the impetuous for my American relatives to react and send me this vital document. Yet, when it arrived, due to the quota system, it took almost another year before I was able to leave Germany.

CHAPTER XV.

MY PARENT'S ODYSSEY

In August 1940 my parents were finally able to leave Germany for Argentina to join my brother who had been there since 1937. Their voyage turned into an odyssey that was beset by several obstacles. They traveled via Russia, Siberia, China, Korea, and Japan. Fortunately for them because of the non-aggression pact signed the previous year between Germany and Russia, travel between the two countries had been eased. Initially, they began their journey by train to Berlin, and had hoped that their final papers could be obtained there from the Russian and the other Consulate, rather quickly. What was to be accomplished in a day or so, kept them in Berlin for four weeks, having to spend frequent periods in air raid shelters, because Allied bombers were attacking that city almost daily, in retaliation of the Germans bombing of London. They were able to stay with friends, but since the completion of the remaining formalities took so long, they missed the first boat which they had been scheduled to board in Japan. When they were finally ready, they took a plane destined for Moscow. But, after the plane first landed at the Russian boarder, the Russians refused them entry. They took a train back to Berlin, hoping to correct an apparent error in their papers. They went to the appropriate authority and left hoping that the problem had been remedied. Now they took another plane to Moscow. Reaching the border once more, the same scenario was repeated by the Russians, again refusing them entry. My father, quite perturbed, took a desperate and bold gamble. He approached the pilot and told him of their predicament. The pilot immediately promised him to take care of the matter, and suggested that my father give him the passport, and he would take of the matter after arriving again back in Berlin. Thus, my father entrusted the pilot with the documents, and he admirably kept his promise by returning the following morning on his next flight. The problem had

arisen due to the fact, as no one could read Russian properly, and their entry permit into Russia had permitted them entry into Russia by land only, and not by air! They stayed overnight in the city of Koenigsberg near the border and were finally able to continue their flight into Moscow, where they remained for four days to make connection with the Trans Sibirian Railroad into Vladiwostock. This trip took two weeks, and they lived on fish, rice and other fare. Traveling through China and Manchuria, the curtains on the train windows had to be closed due to mandatory blackout, whenever they rode through embattled war zones, where Chinese and Japanese were involved. Stopping in the city of Harbin, Manchuria, they were greeted by representatives of HAS, the international Jewish refugee organization. They handed them fresh fruit and other food items. From Vladivostok, they took a ferry to Pusan, Korea, and another ferry to Yokohama, Japan. They also stopped in Tokyo, where they attended a Service at a synagogue. Finally, they sailed from Kobe on the "Buenos Aires Maru," a Japanese freighter on a six-week voyage across the Pacific Ocean, through the Panama Canal, and docked in Buenos Aires, their destination, at the end of September 1940.

CHAPTER XVI.

CROSSING THE BORDER AND LEAVING GERMANY AT LAST

Even after I had received my visa allowing me to enter the U.S. , I still was not able to leave immediately, due to the war-time shortage of shipping space. I was to leave in February 1940 from Holland, but that effort was canceled. Fortunately, I was able to leave in March 1940. On a Sunday morning I began my long train ride to the port city of Genoa, Italy with an overnight's stay in Munich. Before leaving Munich, I learned that a most important meeting was planned between Hitler and Mussolini on that day at Brenner Pass., at the German-Italian border. Our train moved rather rapidly through Innsbruck and the scenic beauty of the Austrian Alps. But shortly before we reached the border, our train stopped and stayed on a siding for hours. Apparently, they did not want any other trains at Brenner Pass when the two "bigwigs" were going to meet. Sitting next to me in my compartment was a man who told me that he was reporter from a prominent newspaper. He appeared quite agitated and frustrated over not being able to cover the "Fuehrer's" historic meeting. I symphasized with him, as he never asked me where I was going and what I was going to do in Italy. Arriving at the town of Brennero in Italy at last, the train station abounded with police and soldiers, as the two leaders were next door in the station house. It is well-known that at that meeting Hitler inveigled Mussolini to enter the war six weeks later, a decision that I am sure Mussolini must have regretted bitterly. In Genoa I boarded the Italian liner "Conte di Savoia," which later in the war was sunk by the Allies. Our departure at the pier was delayed for two hours, because an important passenger was still to come aboard. It was Mr. Sumner Wells, Undersecretary of State, who had just returned from visits with Mussolini of Italy and Goering of Germany. He had been sent by Pres. Roosevelt in a last-ditch attempt to halt the war. As the ship had sailed for one day through the

Mediterranean and entered the Straits of Gibraltar, we were intercepted by a British destroyer. Officers from the Royal Navy came aboard delaying our voyage by six hours. All passengers were asked to line up in the ship's dining room and show their passports to the officers. Of course, England had been at war with Germany and we thought they were looking for suspicious German nationals. On arrival in New York, I was told that this incident had made headlines. The British had followed up on a rumor that Hitler's minister of finance, Dr. Schacht, was aboard our ship and travel to the US in order to secure a big loan for Germany. But the rumor proved false. Incidentally, this was the same Herr Schacht who in 1924 was able to pull Germany out of the run-away inflation, by stabilizing the currency and creating a new Deutschmark.

Freigabe Reg.-Präsident Darmstadt Nr. 1538-79

PANORAMA OF MY TOWN OF BIRTH
(I HAVE A BETTER ONE IN COLOR, BUT HAVE
TEMPORARILY MISPLACED IT)

OUR APARTMENT HOUSE
(WE OCCUPIED 2ND FLOOR)

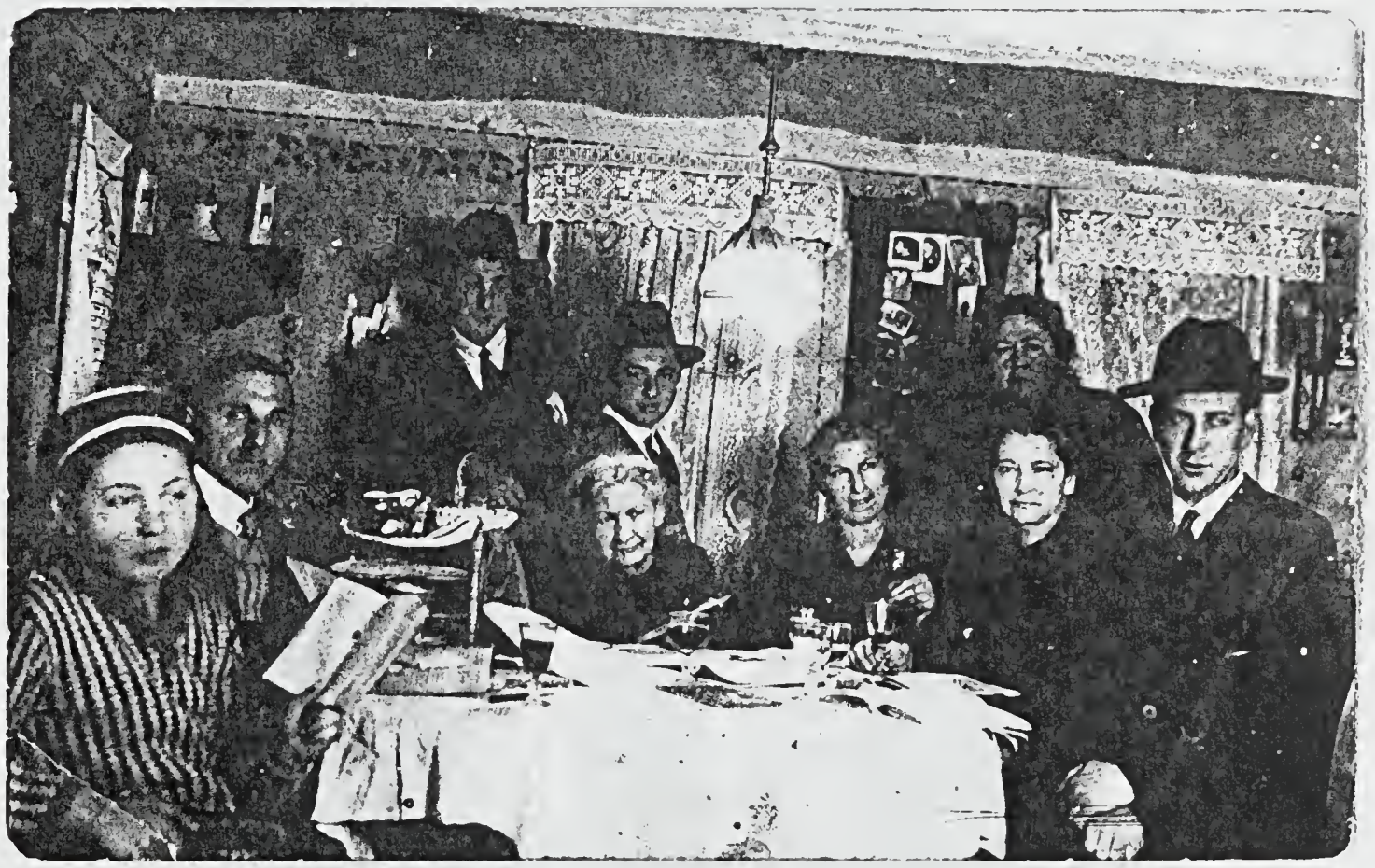
MY GRANDPARENTS HOUSE

Bild links:
Das Kaiserliche Postamt in Birkenau mit der Familie des damaligen Postverwalters Maas, sowie Frl. Else Müller und Frl. Frieda Schmidt (am Fenster).
Bild rechts:
Am hinteren Eingang des Postamtes mit Frl. Anna Lieberknecht, Georg Lieberknecht und Ferdinand Löb. Auf der Treppe wieder Frl. Schmidt und Frl. Müller.
Aufnahmen aus dem Jahre 1917.

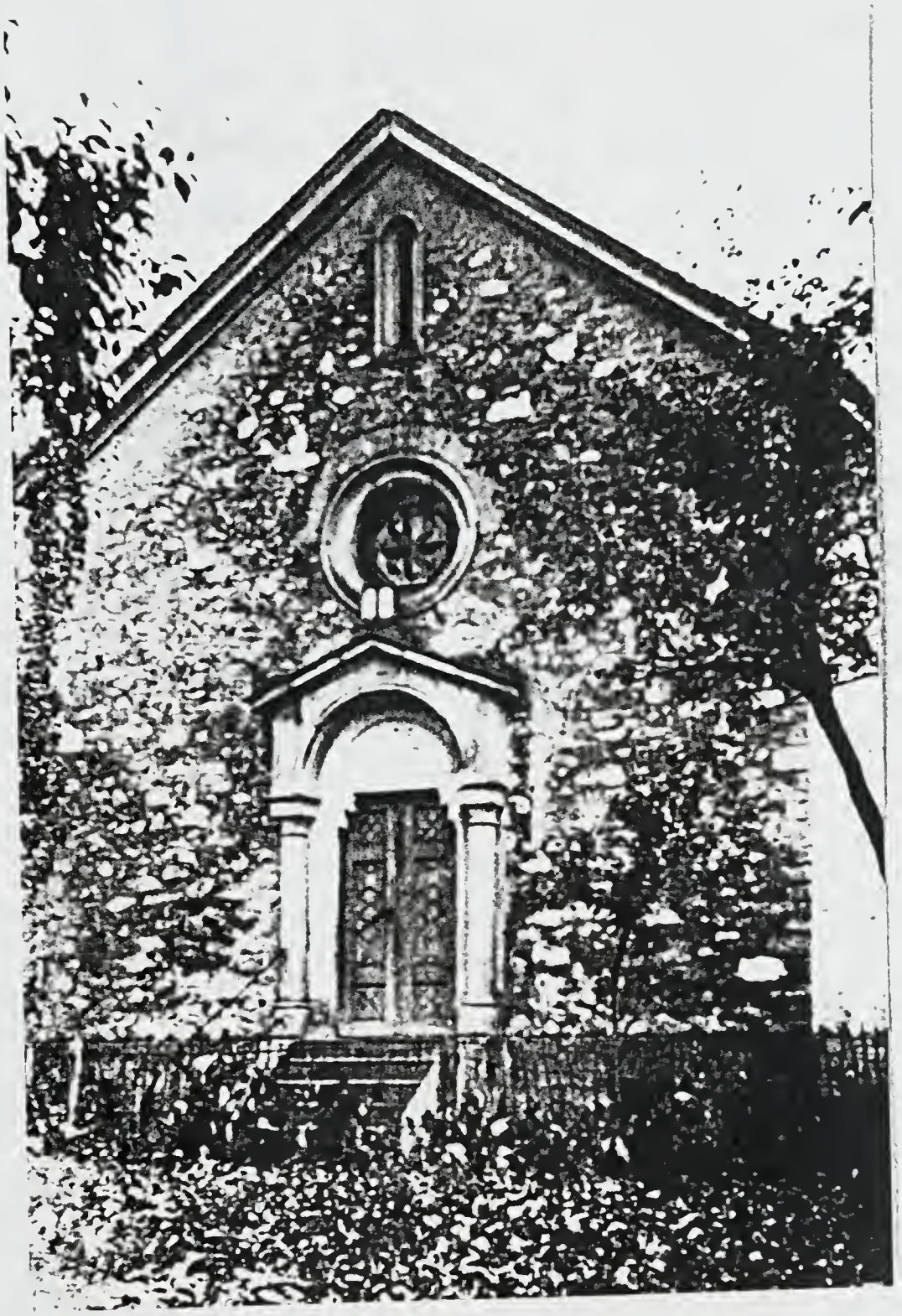
MY FATHER THE "MAILMAN"
(DURING W. WAR I)

WINTERSCENE IN THE "JUDENGASSE"
(WALTER IS 3rd SEATED FROM REAR)

ONE OF THE BARON'S MANSIONS



AT THE FAMILY SEDER (AROUND 1929)
(WALTER IS FIRST ON LEFT WEARING
HIS HIGH SCHOOL CAP)



THE FORMER SYNAGOGUE IN BIRKENAU

21644	Kuinvell	Robin	Sch. N.	5.12.12	Neeot, Ukraine
21645	Wiener	Friedrich	"	3.0.88.	Wien
21646	Eppstein	Julius	"	19.1.95.	Mannheim
21647	Flamm	Kurt	"	5.10.10.	Hilzinoen, Wien
21648	Loeb	Walter	"	12.7.10.	Birkenau
21649	Mayer	Siegfried	"	15.5.82.	Mannheim
21650	Kromm	Walter	"	20.1.96.	Stuttgart
21651	Hahn	Artur	"	21.12.13	Heilbronn
21652	Gruber	Ludwig	"	1.7.77.	Augsburg
21653	Mauer	Otto	"	2.5.84.	Speyer a. Rh.
21654	Loewe	Isidor	"	18.7.92.	Karlsruhe
21655	Blum	Arnold	"	2.1.22	Nürnberg
21656	Schiff	Gerhard	"	17.8.70	Plock (Russisch)

EXTRACT FROM THE OFFICIAL DACHAU REGISTRY
(SHOWING WALTER'S ENTRY AS PRISONER # 21648)

WALTER'S JEWISH
(KENNKARTE)
ID CARD

Rennort:	Pforzheim
Rennummer:	H 01467
Gültig bis	23. Januar 1944
Name	Löb
Vornamen	Julius Walter Israel
Geburtstag	22. Juli 1916
Geburtsort	Lindenau Kreis Leipzig
Beruf	Kaufmann
Unveränderliche Kennzeichen	keine
Veränderliche Kennzeichen	keine
Bemerkungen:	Brünn

Julius Walter Israel Löb
(Unterschrift des Rennkarteninhabers)

Karlsruhe, den 23. Jan. 19 39

Der Polizeipräsident
Pass-Amt
(Ausstellungsbehörde)

Löb

Dienststempel